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Terrorism Review



15 November 1984

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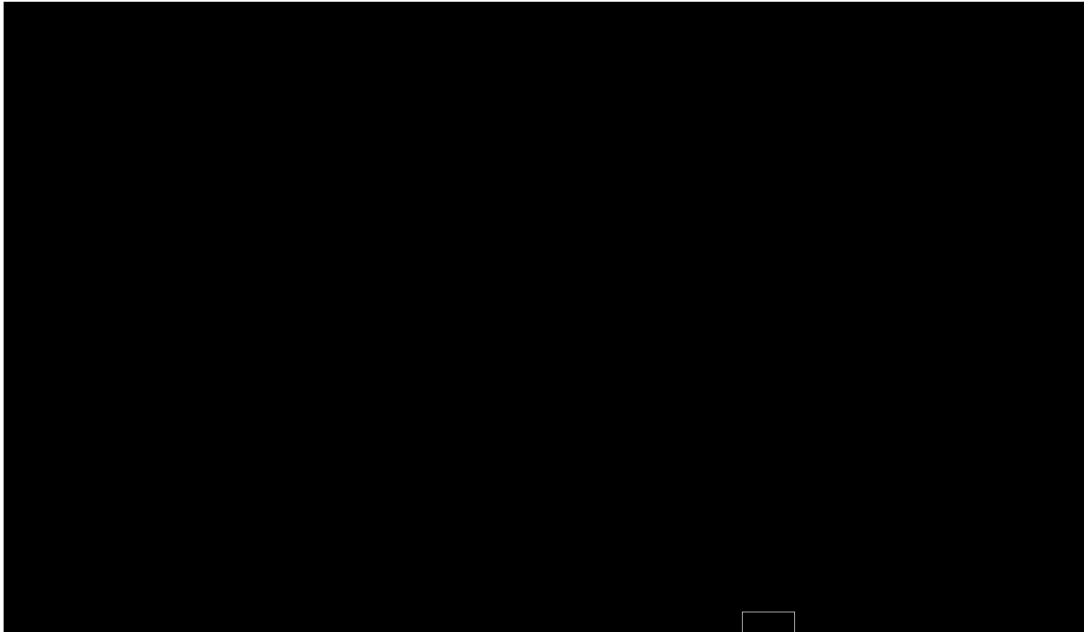
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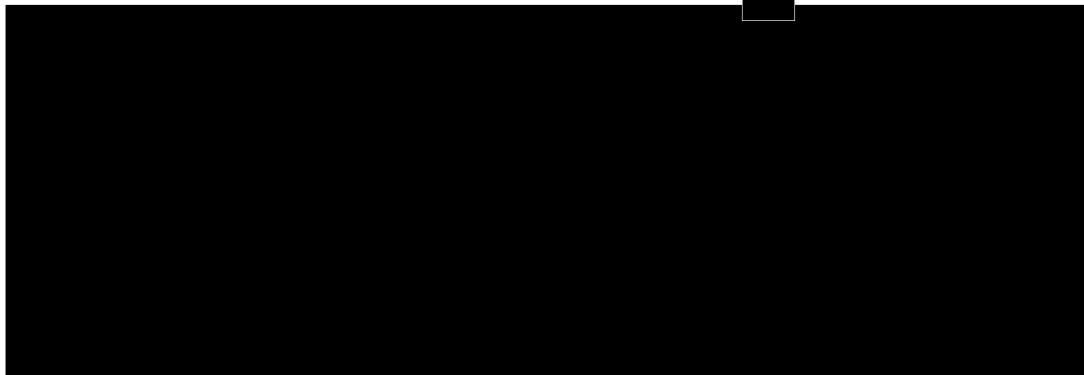
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21 Terrorism in Colombia and Prospects for Peace [REDACTED]



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Terrorism in Colombia and Prospects for Peace

Political violence has ebbed and flowed in Colombia for more than three decades but has never really disappeared. At present, there are four major terrorist organizations operating in the cities and countryside conducting kidnappings, extortion, bombings, bank robberies, murder, takeovers of towns, and other forms of violence. Although these groups have never seriously threatened Colombia's political stability, their activities have hurt Colombia's economy and have undermined public faith in the government's ability to protect its citizens. They all have an anti-US attitude and have in the past victimized US citizens.

Given the intensity and longevity of Colombian terrorism, there is little hope that a lasting cessation of violence will result from President Betancur's peace plan, which includes cease-fire agreements with the major terrorist groups. Adding to the difficulties in achieving peace is the growing violence of the narcotics traffickers, who have developed close ties with the terrorists.

The Terrorist Groups

The major Colombian guerrilla groups trace their origins to the bitter civil war known as "la violencia" that lasted from 1948 to 1957. During this period, members of the Conservative and Liberal parties fought each other in a bloody confrontation that cost the lives of at least 200,000 people. Members of both parties formed guerrilla bands either for group protection or in order to harass the enemy. When "la violencia" was finally brought to an end, many guerrilla groups refused to lay down their arms; rural banditry had become a way of life.

The largest insurgent-terrorist group, the *Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)*, has about 25 guerrilla "fronts" with some 2,500 armed combatants and a support organization of approximately 10,000 sympathizers. The FARC was established in 1966 as the armed wing of the Moscow-

line Communist Party of Colombia (PCC), but generally has operated independently of the PCC. The FARC is primarily a rural organization and seldom operates in the cities. It obtains its funds mostly through kidnaping, extortion of wealthy ranchers, and, since 1980, from the narcotics trade.

The best known terrorist group in Colombia is the *19th of April Movement (M-19)*, which emerged in January 1974 when it stole the sword of Simon Bolivar from a Bogota museum. Since then, M-19—which took its name from the date of the election defeat in 1970 of former dictator/president Gen. Gustavo Rojas Pinilla—has demonstrated an ability to conduct daring and spectacular incidents. On New Year's Eve in 1978, M-19 members raided an Army arms depot by tunneling into it and making off with more than 500 weapons. In February 1980, 16 heavily armed members seized the Dominican Republic Embassy in Bogota during a diplomatic reception and took 80 hostages, including the US Ambassador, triggering a siege that lasted for more than two months.

M-19 has suffered several setbacks since the Dominican Republic Embassy incident. Its reputation was tarnished in early 1981 when an M-19 splinter group kidnaped and later killed a US citizen affiliated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a US religious organization. In March 1981, M-19 attempted to launch a coordinated rural attack on various coastal towns. Several hundred recruits, newly trained in Cuba, landed in several boats and were quickly confronted by Colombian security forces who killed more than 25 attackers and captured 800. Because M-19 had often claimed it was a purely Colombian group, its image was further tarnished by its now-obvious association with Cuba.

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The worst blow to M-19 was the death of its charismatic leader, Jaime Bateman, in a plane crash in Panama in the spring of 1983. Since then, the movement, which is currently believed to number about 900 activists, has not mounted a large-scale operation and is rumored to be divided. It obtains most of its funds from bank robberies, kidnappings, and drug trafficking. [REDACTED]

The *National Army of Liberation (ELN)*, is a pro-Cuban urban/rural organization with approximately 500 combatants. Founded in 1963, the ELN carried out terrorist attacks until 1973 when Colombian military raids crippled the movement. Cuba subsequently withdrew its support. The group remained relatively weak until 1982 when it began to increase its urban and rural activities, especially kidnappings. In November 1983, ELN terrorists kidnaped President Betancur's brother, but released him in the face of nationwide revulsion. [REDACTED]

The *Popular Liberation Army (EPL)* was founded in 1967 by the pro-Beijing Colombian Communist Party/Marxist-Leninist (PCC/ML). It has about 600 members, of which about 350 belong to its urban branch, the Pedro Leon Arboleda group (PLA), which often operates independently of the EPL. Both the EPL and PLA have attacked US interests. The EPL attacked the US Embassy and the US Marine Security Guard residence in Bogota in the late 1970s. [REDACTED]

The Trotskyite *Workers Auto Defense Movement (ADO)* is an obscure but violent group that was almost completely destroyed in 1982 with the arrests of several of its leaders. The ADO has recently resurfaced and reportedly was cooperating with the ELN in a plot to attack US Embassy officials last spring. Another shadowy group is the *People's Revolutionary Organization (ORP)*, which carried out two major kidnappings in 1983 but then disappeared. It is possible that the name ORP was used by M-19 or another terrorist group. [REDACTED]

Counterinsurgency Efforts

The Colombian military has waged a campaign against rural and urban terrorists for the last 30 years, committing 10,000 to 15,000 field troops to counterinsurgency operations. Over the years, the armed forces have also assumed a major part in shaping national policy toward the insurgents. For instance, state-of-siege decrees codified in the security statute of 1978 gave the military the responsibility for trying insurgents in military courts (a reaction to a slow, corrupt, and lenient civilian court system). Betancur has attempted to reduce the role of the military in internal affairs—against the wishes of the armed forces command—while at the same time he has recognized the necessity of maintaining a strong military counterterrorist capability. [REDACTED]

At the behest of Betancur, who came into office committed to achieving peace with the guerrillas, on 20 November 1982 a general amnesty was approved by the Congress. The amnesty was designed to entice guerrillas to lay down their arms and enter the mainstream of Colombian politics. Under the generous terms of the decree, all those accused of politically motivated crimes except murder were pardoned, and the amnestied guerrillas were promised economic benefits as an incentive for adopting legitimate livelihoods. A civic action program was designed to redress the social and economic inadequacies in the countryside, a long-professed goal of the insurgents. As an adjunct to the amnesty

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project, Betancur formed a peace commission to study ways and means to solve the social, economic, and political inequities that had fed the insurgency. [REDACTED]

M-19 and the FARC initially indicated their support for the amnesty. After the bill became law, however, M-19 rejected the pardon and demanded a six-month truce. M-19 blamed the Army for the failure, claiming that in one area the Army was blocking M-19 members from turning themselves in by conducting offensive operations, ambushes, and blockades of guerrillas in regions they controlled. FARC soon followed M-19 in rejecting the program, while the ELN and EPL never accepted the concept of amnesty. After a few months, terrorism returned to its previously high levels. Only a small number of guerrillas turned themselves in to the authorities. [REDACTED]

The main cause of the program's failure was the guerrillas' insistence on several conditions before accepting amnesty that the government could or would not meet. Their main demands were initiation of a "national dialogue," imposition of a truce, and withdrawal of the military from guerrilla strongholds. Some were extreme, such as the one requiring that all multinational corporations leave Colombia. The demand for a national dialogue was partially met by Betancur's encouragement of the peace commission to meet with the guerrillas and hear their views. It was this commission's work which eventually led to cease-fire agreements with the FARC and M-19. [REDACTED]

Impact on US Interests in Colombia

Although the large majority of the victims of violence in Colombia are Colombians, foreigners—especially US citizens—also have been targeted by Colombian terrorist groups. In 1977 a Peace Corps volunteer was kidnaped by the FARC and released only three years later after the payment of a large ransom. US Ambassador Diego Asencio was held hostage for two months in 1980 during M-19's seizure of the Dominican Republic Embassy. In 1981 a US citizen working for the Summer Institute of Linguistics was kidnaped by an M-19 faction and later murdered. [REDACTED]

Three Americans were kidnaped in 1983. The most spectacular attack was ORP's kidnaping of a Texaco executive, Kenneth Bishop, in a bloody shootout in downtown Bogota. He was released five weeks later

after the payment of a large ransom. In May the FARC kidnaped Catherine Woods Kirby, a rancher, and in June the FARC abducted Russel Martin Stendal, also a rancher. Both were released following the payment of ransoms. [REDACTED]

US Government installations also have been targeted. In July 1978 a bomb placed on the grounds of the US Embassy knocked down one of the security walls. In 1980 a bomb intended for the US Consulate in Cali exploded prematurely, killing two M-19 terrorists. In 1983, USIS-sponsored binational centers in Barranquilla and Bucaramanga were damaged by bombs, and a guard at the Medellin binational center was killed in a terrorist bombing. On 22 May 1984 two bombs exploded near the US Embassy. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

In the last seven years the threat to US officials and US businessmen has steadily increased. Following the Bishop kidnaping and M-19 threats to target multinational organizations in 1983, several major US firms with operations in Colombia decided to pull out their US personnel. Other US firms have been discouraged from investing or expanding their operations in Colombia. [REDACTED]

Broader US interests also are affected by the corrosive effects of Colombian terrorist activity. The United States has an interest in assuring that Colombia has a stable democracy and a workable economy. Kidnapings and extortion have led numerous Colombian businessmen to flee the country and transfer assets abroad, resulting in increased unemployment and slowed economic growth. Although democratic traditions are strong, because of the state of siege that has existed for almost three decades, the military has acquired an informally institutionalized role in political affairs. Although the

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military strongly supports Colombia's democratic principles and there is little threat of a military takeover, the possibility of a coup is sometimes rumored during periods of heightened terrorist activity. [REDACTED]

Foreign Connections

Colombian terrorist groups maintain contacts with foreign governments and terrorist groups. FARC, M-19, and ELN terrorists, for example, have been trained by Cuba. At the time of its formation, the ELN had particularly close ties with Cuba, receiving training, advice, and possibly funds. [REDACTED]

Although M-19 originally asserted it was not supported by foreign governments, the 1981 Cuban-sponsored invasion on Colombia's Pacific Coast disproved its claim. To protest Cuba's role in this invasion, Colombia broke diplomatic relations. Further evidence of M-19 ties with Cuba surfaced in 1980-81 when Castro began using Colombia's narcotics ring to funnel arms and funds to M-19, using as intermediary Jaime Guillot Lara, a Colombian drug trafficker now in custody in Mexico. [REDACTED]

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There is little information on the FARC's foreign connections. [REDACTED]


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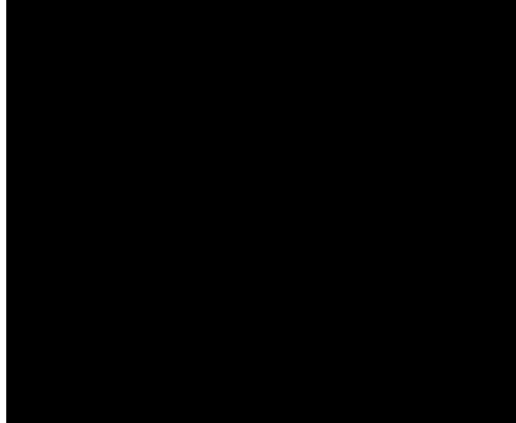
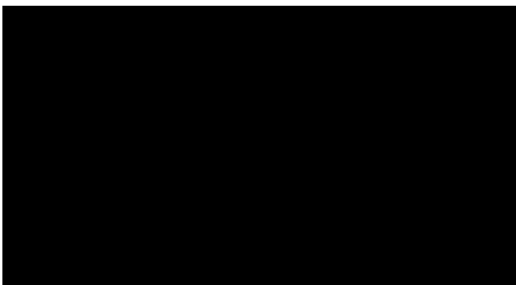
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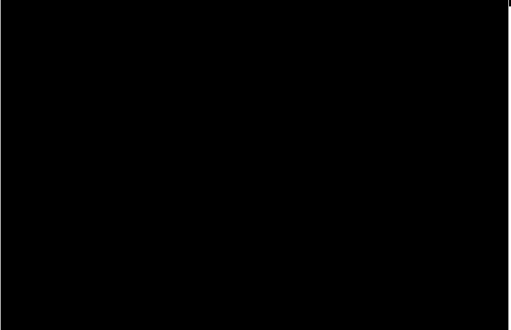
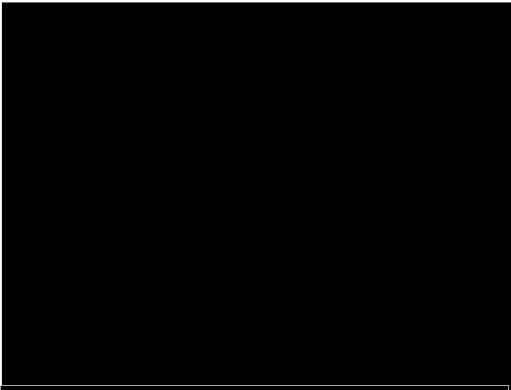
Prospects for Peace

On 28 May 1984, a cease-fire agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC went into effect. Under the terms of the agreement, FARC will condemn and forbid kidnappings, extortion, and terrorism in return for pledges of political, social, and economic reform. The FARC will be allowed to reorganize itself politically, while the Betancur administration will urge the Congress to institute political and agrarian reforms, facilitate the establishment and functioning of communal and peasant organizations, workers cooperatives, and the like. Two provisions not included in the agreement are the laying down of arms by the guerrillas and the withdrawal of armed forces from guerrilla-dominated areas. Thus, the potential for renewed activity by either side is high. 



Nevertheless, the insurgent groups stand to benefit in several ways from the cease-fire agreements. The most obvious advantage to them is that they will gain time to rest and reorganize, without government harassment. The guerrillas may also need to regain a more positive public image. By rejecting the 1982 amnesty, the insurgents cast themselves in the roles of bad guys, with the government appearing to be the good guy. 

Few Colombians believe that the insurgent organizations actually intend to lay down their arms and convert themselves into political parties. Many FARC guerrillas are not ideologically committed; rather, they pursue the guerrilla way of life as a profession and a livelihood—they are classic Latin American *bandidos*. Furthermore, the FARC-narcotics connection has become so close that the government's crackdown on narcotics traffickers could lead to confrontations with FARC guerrillas and spark military confrontations in violation of the cease-fire. 



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M-19 and EPL members as well as government forces continued to conduct operations during the cease-fire negotiations, which delayed and almost torpedoed the signing of the accords. In July, a wave of kidnappings occurred in various regions, and an EPL leader was reported to have told the media that the group used and would continue to use kidnappings as "political activity" fundamental to the support of the guerrilla group. Bombings continued as well, and M-19 claimed responsibility for an explosion at the Honduran Consulate in Barranquilla on 20 July. Another bombing at the Chilean Consulate in Medellin on 23 July may have been the work of the ELN. It is not clear if these bombings and other acts were condoned by the leadership of the terrorist groups or were the work of dissidents operating on their own initiative. [REDACTED]

Just as the talks were reaching the final stages, M-19 leader Carlos Toledo Plata was killed by unknown individuals. One day later, M-19 and members of the Ricardo Franco Front invaded and temporarily occupied the industrial city of Yumbo, killing nearly 40 persons. Just before the scheduled ceremony to sign the cease-fire, an elite unit of Colombian police attacked a **convoy carrying M-19 leader Carlos Picarro Leon**, wounding him and several other M-19 members. Evidently, both sides meant to demonstrate that it was not through any lack of will or means to fight that they had agreed to the cease-fire [REDACTED]

Perhaps one of the greatest dangers to the cease-fire is the narcotics/terrorist connection. Although terrorists and narcotics traffickers have not conducted joint operations in the past, this could change. The terrorists could soon find themselves in need of money—they have promised to stop such fund-raising operations as kidnappings—and could be tempted to conduct operations for or with the narcotics traffickers. The traffickers, for their part, probably will become even more dangerous and anti-US owing to Betancur's decision to extradite narcotics traffickers to the United States, a decision prompted

by the April 1984 assassination of Justice Minister Lara. They have little to gain from the cease-fire and much to gain from closer cooperation with the terrorists. [REDACTED]

The record for achieving peace through amnesties and cease-fire agreements in Latin America has been mixed. In Venezuela a "pacification program" in 1968 offering amnesty for guerrillas who chose to surrender proved to be the final blow to an eight-year-old insurgent movement, already weakened by guerrilla factionalization and government military successes. On the other hand, after Argentine President Juan Peron released political prisoners in 1973, terrorist activity increased and soon almost paralyzed the country. [REDACTED]

The tradition of democracy in Colombia simply may not be as strong as the tradition of violence. The political and economic reforms demanded by the guerrillas in the cease-fire agreements could take years to implement, and the guerrillas could tire of waiting. Also, if the guerrillas do not gain a significant political following in a short term, they will probably be discouraged from following a peaceful path. The implementation of the plan was largely due to the President's personal popularity and credibility, and its endurance will depend on the ability of his successors to maintain his plan [REDACTED]



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